

Field Report

North Moab Recreation Area

■ 1.0 Summary

The North Moab Recreation Area is managed by the Department of Interior's BLM and is located in Grand County, Utah. The North Moab Recreation Area is approximately six million acres in size and is comprised of six percent private land, 10 percent state of Utah land, and 84 percent federal land. There are many recreation activities that the North Moab Recreation Area has that bring users to southeast Utah. Mountain and road biking are popular activities, especially along the renowned Slickrock Bike Trail. This trail was first established in 1969 by a group of motorcyclists. Mountain bikers discovered the trail in the early 1980s and it has grown in popularity ever since. Additionally, off-road vehicles may use the Recreation Area along the extensive trail system. All trails are multiple use, including hiking and horseback riding. Other recreation that takes place in North Moab include camping, hiking to archeological and historical sites, and river rafting and kayaking.

Most campsites are located along State Route 128 from State Highway 191 in Moab north-east up the Colorado River. The BLM is improving the campsites along State Route 128 with interpretive trails, information kiosks, and improved camping facilities. Additionally, a bike lane is being planned from the junction of State Route 128 and State Highway 191 in Moab for about three miles up State Route 128 to the Porcupine Rim Trailhead (the Porcupine Rim Trail currently has 25,000 bicyclists riding annually). This bike lane would provide a safe place for bicyclists to ride from the city of Moab to the many trailheads located along State Route 128. Currently, the bike lane is only in planning stages and no funding has been identified for the construction of the bike lane.

The North Moab Recreation Area is a strong candidate for the introduction of an Alternative Transportation System (ATS) for the following reasons:

- State Route 128 is a dangerous roadway for both bicyclists and vehicles; and
- The Colorado River bridge along State Highway 191 is a choke point and major point of conflict for bikes and vehicles.

Feasible ATS alternatives for the North Moab Recreation Area include the following:

- A system of continuous and safe bike lanes and/or paths linking the city of Moab with the recreation uses along State Route 128, State Highway 191, Arches National Park, and the North Moab Recreation Area;

- Reconstruction of the State Highway 191 Colorado River bridge to safely accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians/hikers;
- A regular route or on-demand transit service from the city of Moab to the North Moab Recreation Area and Arches National Park; and
- All ATS solutions should be closely coordinated with solutions at Arches National Park, since many persons are users of both areas.

■ 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Location

Located in the Moab area of southeastern Utah, the North Moab Recreation Area is a conglomeration of parcels of federal land managed by the Department of Interior's BLM. Major access to Moab and the surrounding area is by way of State Highway 191 and State Route 128. The city of Moab is situated in nearly the center of the North Moab Recreation Area. The current population of the city of Moab is 4,480 persons. This is a decrease from the 1990 U.S. Census population of 6,200 persons. Additionally, the current population of Grand County is 8,800 persons.

2.2 Administration and Classification

North Moab Recreation Area is managed by the Department of Interior's BLM. The contact person for the North Moab Recreation Area is Russ Van Koch.

2.3 Physical Description

North Moab Recreation Area is a high desert area with rough terrain and a multitude of rock formations. The area is heavily used by outdoor recreation enthusiasts. The key physical characteristics related to transportation are:

- The BLM land is made up of many smaller parcels of land combined to make a total area of several million acres.
- The majority of outdoor users in the Moab Recreation Area are off-road cyclists and off-road four wheel drive vehicles. Other uses include rafting, camping, hiking, and equestrian activities.

2.4 Mission and Goals of North Moab Recreation Area

It is the mission of the BLM to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Congress recognized the value of the remaining public lands by declaring that these lands would remain in public ownership. Congress also gave the term “multiple use” management, defined as “management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people.”

It is the goal of the North Moab Recreation Area to balance the needs of commercial and recreational use with the management of natural and cultural resources.

2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

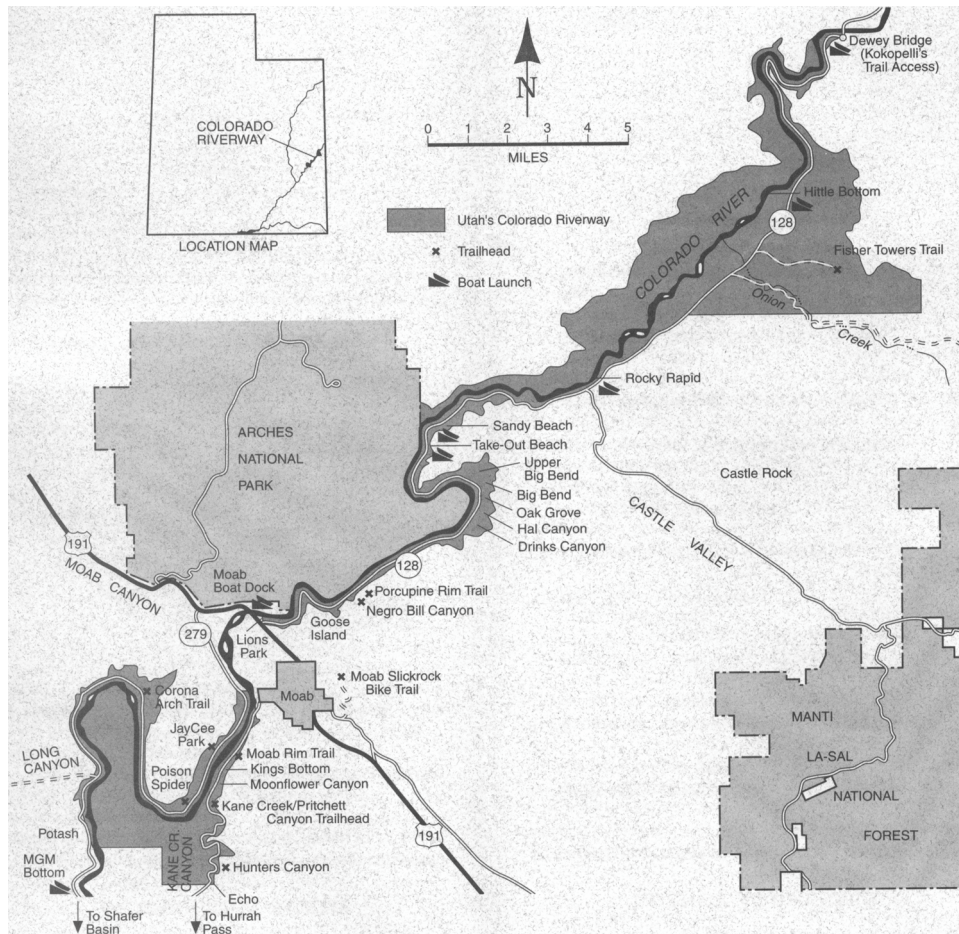
In the past 10 to 15 years, recreational use of the BLM land in the Moab area has increased dramatically, largely due to the explosive growth in mountain biking. For instance, mountain biking on the Slickrock Trail, the area’s most famous route, rose from 67,000 rides in 1992 to 90,000 rides in 1993. Most of the trails in the area are physically and technically demanding. Nearly 88 percent of the riders classified themselves as intermediate or expert riders while only three percent classified themselves as beginning riders.

In addition to cycling, off-road motor vehicle use has also increased. More than 80 percent of the off-road vehicle users rate themselves as advanced or expert, while only about two percent rated themselves as beginners. The average number of vehicles in each off-road vehicle group was 15 with an average number of 27 people in each group.

River recreation is also a high use in the area. Rafting, fishing, and recreational swimming are all activities along the Colorado River. The BLM controls many of the accesses to the river in the Moab area and provides primitive camping facilities at various intervals along the Colorado River corridor. (See Figure 1 for map of Colorado River Corridor in the Moab area.)

■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Because of the physical fragmentation of the North Moab Recreation Area, there is no cohesive link to the BLM lands. Much of the recreation taking place on these lands is non-motorized, but to get to the BLM lands you must use existing highways. There are the following concerns:

Figure 1. The Colorado River Corridor in the Moab, Utah Area

- There are no shoulders on many of the roadways, limiting bicycle use.
- There are poor sight lines on the existing highways, making shared use of motor vehicles and cycling dangerous.
- Many of the BLM trailhead and parking lot areas have poorly designed entrances that make merging into traffic dangerous.
- The State Highway 191 Colorado River bridge is a narrow two-lane, heavily-traveled bridge that is the only access to recreation areas north of the city of Moab. It is very dangerous for cyclists and slow traffic.

3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The North Moab Recreational area has world class cycling and off-road vehicle trails, but there is no concession to connect the Federal Lands with the city of Moab via alternative transportation. The major issue for transportation is using alternative transportation to

alleviate the congestion and dangerous areas on the surrounding highway system for users in of the BLM lands.

Average daily roadway volumes in 1995 in the vicinity of the heavy use roadways corridors of the city of Moab, Arches National Park, State Highway 191, and State Route 128 were moderately high but did not significantly place the roadways at a capacity deficiency level. The 1995 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) volumes are:

- 5,530 vehicles on State Highway 191 at the northern city limits of Moab;
- 4,990 vehicles at the junction of the Colorado River and State Route 128;
- 2,570 vehicles at the access road to Arches National Park; and
- 695 vehicles on State Route 128 near the junction of State Highway 191.

Although the traffic volume levels are not high and the roadway level of service is operating in the area of “B”, the geometry and grade of State Highway 191 and State Route 128 are deficient in allowing persons to safely travel through and at the same time allow visitors to access North Moab Recreation Area and Arches National Park. Furthermore, the State Highway 191 Colorado River bridge is deficient because of the lack of shoulders on the bridge and the high number of trucks operating along State Highway 191. A review of traffic counts reveal that the percent of trucks operating along State Highway 191 is in the area of 15 percent to 20 percent. This is significantly higher than the national and state averages of five percent to nine percent of trucks operating along major highways. This roadway and bridge deficiency is further heightened when persons riding bicycles along State Highway 191 are factored into the capacity deficiency analysis. There is a moderate to high number of bicyclists who use State Highway 191 to access Arches National Park, the biking trails along State Highway 191, and the biking trails and camping facilities along State Route 128.

3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The economy of Moab has evolved from primarily a mining town to a town whose major economy is based on tourism. Moab and the surrounding area have a lot to offer in the way of outdoor activities including mountain biking, river rafting, off-road vehicle use, hiking, and sightseeing.

Local leaders are aware of the symbiotic relationship that the town has with the surrounding Federal Lands. It is a major tourism hub for the area. Since none of the Federal Lands surrounding Moab have services other than primitive camping and pit toilets, Moab provides services such as hotels, restaurants, guide services, and shopping. Because there is a relationship between Moab and the surrounding Federal Lands, the City is concerned about connecting their town with alternative transportation to the Federal Lands in the form of bicycle lanes, bus systems, shuttles to specific sites, etc.

3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns

If not managed properly, there can be negative impacts to natural and cultural resources because of transportation. Some following concerns are:

- Concern for destroying native vegetation and fragile cryptobiotic soils because of overuse and lack of public education;
- Protection of Petroglyphs from vandalism;
- Protection of winter Desert Big Horn Sheep grounds near the entrance to the Park; and
- The balance between commercial and recreational use of the land and conservation of natural resources.

3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The goal of the BLM land is to balance the needs and experiences of the visitor with the management of commercial use. Several issues include:

- Overcrowding of popular trails;
- Accommodating different types of users while managing natural resources; and
- Dangerous intersections from highways leading to BLM trailheads.

■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

4.1 BLM Plans

The BLM has future plans in the North Moab Recreation Area for changing access points to several trailhead parking areas and camping sites to create safer roadways and access points for trails and camping facilities. In addition, the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) is studying and planning the possible construction of a bicycle lane on State Route 128 to alleviate the dangerous conditions for bicyclists using this roadway.

4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

Interagency cooperation and the city of Moab recently created the Moab Information Center in downtown Moab. The center was created so visitors can receive information for the whole area at one central location.

■ 5.0 Assessment of Need and System Options

5.1 Magnitude of Need

There is a great need for alternative transportation within the North Moab Recreation Area, especially around the city of Moab and along State Highway 191 and State Route 128. Alternative transportation could serve as a link from the city of Moab to North Moab Recreation Area trails and facilities, cutting down the bottleneck at the Colorado River Bridge and the bicycle/vehicle conflicts along State Highway 191 and State Route 128. In addition, alternative transportation may enhance the visitor experience within the Recreation Area and Arches National Park by relieving congestion at major attractions. Finally, by providing ATS to visitors of North Moab Recreation Area, the vehicle access and associated trailhead and camping facility parking problems could be slightly to moderately relieved.

5.2 Range of Feasible Transit Alternatives

There are a number of feasible transportation alternatives that would assist in providing an excellent visitor experience as well as move vehicles efficiently and safely into and through the North Moab Recreation Area.

- Providing continuous and safe bike lanes or paths from the city of Moab and along State Route 128 to recreational facilities in the North Moab Recreation Area and continuing north along State Highway 191.
- Improve and possibly reconstruct the State Highway 191 Colorado River bridge, to safely and adequately accommodate bicyclists and hikers crossing the bridge to access the Recreation Area along State Route 128 and State Highway 191.
- Initiating regular transit service from the city of Moab (possibly near the Moab Information Center) to major camping facilities and trailhead areas along both State Route 128 and State Highway 191.
- If regular transit service is initiated, set policy direction on how the transit service would be operated and what areas within the Recreation Area would the transit service provide access to the transit riders.
- If regular transit service is initiated, provide transit shelters at the major camping facilities and trailhead areas.

5.3 General Transit System Considerations

Any transit system within the North Moab Recreation Area should:

- Introduce the bicycle and transit system gradually with a maximum of public information, education and support;
- Design the transit vehicles specifically to accommodate large parties carrying backpacks and supplies for camping and hiking to scenic viewpoints;
- Design the system to meet peak-hour demands of access to recreational areas within North Moab Recreation Area in order to encourage ridership and maintain the quality of the visitor experience;
- Include an interpretive narrative by the driver or have a park staff member on the transit vehicle to provide a narrative of park attractions;
- Utilize new technology to inform transit riders of the timing of the next transit vehicle arrival, the number of persons accessing each site, and other information that would enhance the visitor experience;
- Include attractive signs and maps indicating the route of the transit vehicle and the times of arrivals and departures of the vehicle;
- Utilize fuel that minimizes offensive odors and utilize a vehicle that is quiet;
- Include transit shelters in order to provide shade and protection from the weather; and
- Include bicycle racks on the transit vehicles.

■ 6.0 Bibliography

Moab West and Moab East Recreation Guides and Maps

Utah Department of Transportation. Internet site: <http://www.dot.state.ut.us/>. Information printed September 1999.

■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

Meeting Held September 7, 1999. Attendees: Brent Williams of the City of Moab

Meeting Held September 7, 1999. Attendees: David Hutchinson of Grand County

Meeting Held September 5, 1999 in Moab, Utah and BLM lands. Attendees: Russ VonKoch of BLM